

VZCZCXRO0109
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHJM #2394 3231515
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 191515Z NOV 07
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9710
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0125
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 002394

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/WATERS/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2017

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SUBJECT: ICRC REPORTS HARSH CONDITIONS IN GAZA

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary. ICRC Head of Delegation Christophe Harnish and Gaza Office Director Tony Dalviel said Gazans face a steady decline in health, reduced services, decaying infrastructure, and an intensified sense of isolation. They said the building-blocks for a large-scale humanitarian disaster are being set in place, but ICRC and other humanitarian agencies are having difficulty preparing to respond. End Summary.

Gazans Feeling Isolated; Their
Infrastructure Declining

12. (C) In a November 14 meeting ICRC Gaza Office Director Tony Dalviel, who has lived in Gaza for nine months, described it as living in "a police state." The Hamas Executive Force is heavy-handed, but efficient, in imposing law and order, he said. ICRC Head of Delegation Christophe Harnish said Gazans' feeling of isolation is growing as people seeking medical treatment or education outside Gaza are denied permits. Dalviel reported little success in securing permits for medical cases or importing materials needed to repair infrastructure. Every decision to import materials, even one washing machine for a hospital, must go to senior MoD officials, he said. In October, ICRC received 1,200 requests from Palestinians seeking medical treatment outside Gaza; of those, 780 people have not left Gaza.

13. (C) Dalviel said GoI restrictions on the movement of people and goods have intensified Gazans' dependency on international assistance. Diets are limited mostly to WFP and UNRWA handouts, negatively impacting the population's health. Dalviel said rolling blackouts exist throughout Gaza. He noted that already-fragile health, sanitation, agriculture, and education infrastructure continues to decay.

According to Dalviel cement is completely unavailable in Gaza, and the construction industry has shut down, leaving engineers and laborers unemployed. He concluded that the private sector, except for companies distributing food, medicine, and fuel, is totally incapacitated.

ICRC Tries to Prepare for Humanitarian Crisis

14. (C) Harnish and Dalviel said Gazans are surviving for now, but the building blocks are being put in place for a large-scale humanitarian disaster as vital infrastructure decays. However, as needs increase, ICRC's capacity to respond diminishes for the same reasons, Harnish said. "We cannot plan since we cannot import what we need for a crisis; we cannot even get in what we need now," he said. Harnish noted that definitions of "humanitarian crisis" vary, so we may only know that there is a crisis when we see it.

WALLES